DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 475 385 SO 035 026

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TITLE	The Civic Mission of Schools: Key Ideas in a Research-Based Report on Civic Education in the United States. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-SO-2003-5
PUB DATE	2003-05-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0016
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 2805 East Tenth Street, Suite 120, Bloomington, IN 47408. Tel: 800-266-3815 (Toll Free); Fax: 812-855-0455; e-mail: ericso@indiana.edu; Web site: http://ericso.indiana.edu.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Citizenship Education; *Civics; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Public Schools; Research Reports; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS	Carnegie Corporation of New York; ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

A new report sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement reviews and interprets research on school-based civic education in the United States. Fifty-six leading experts provided the content of the report, reviewed and modified the draft version, and endorsed it. This digest summarizes key aspects of the report: (1) the goals of civic education in schools; (2) promising practices in the teaching of civics/government in a democracy; and (3) selected recommendations for school administrators and policymakers. (Contains 13 references.) (BT)

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EDO-SO-2003-5 May 2003

The Civic Mission of Schools: Key Ideas in a Research-Based Report on Civic Education in the United States

By John J. Patrick

A new report sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) reviews and interprets research on school-based civic education in the United States of America. Fifty-six leading experts provided the content of the report, reviewed and modified the draft of it, and endorsed it. Copies of the report, *The Civic Mission of Schools*, are available free of charge on the World Wide Web <www.civicmissionofschools.org>. This Digest summarizes key aspects of the report: (1) the goals of civic education in schools, (2) promising practices in the teaching of civics/government in a democracy, and (3)selected recommendations for school administrators and policymakers.

Goals of Civic Education. The mission of school-based civic education is to develop competent citizens who have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to participate responsibly and effectively in the political and civic life of a democracy. Competent and responsible citizens:

- are informed and thoughtful about the principles and practices of democracy
- participate in their communities through membership in voluntary civil associations
- act politically to accomplish public purposes
- have moral and civic virtues, such as responsibility of the common good

Promising Practices in Teaching and Learning. *The Civic Mission of Schools* presents six research-based practices that can increase the civic knowledge and engagement of students.

First, emphasize formal instruction in government, history, law, and democracy. Students perform better on tests of civic knowledge and skills if they experience extensive and detailed teaching and learning of core principles in the theory and practice of constitutional democracy (Niemi and Junn 1998). Moreover, there is a strong relationship between civic knowledge and various attributes of democratic citizenship, such as a propensity for political interest, civic/political engagement, political tolerance, and commitment to the common good (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Putnam 2000; Torney-Purta and Others 2001).

Second, extensively incorporate into the classroom discussions of current issues and events—local, national, and international—that students perceive to be important in their lives. If these discussions are open to free expression of diverse perspectives and opinions, then they are more likely to have a positive effect on civic learning and achievement of core characteristics of democratic citizenship (Baldi and Others 2001; Niemi and Junn 1998; Torney-Purta and Others 2001).

Third, provide students with ample opportunities to apply formal civic learning in the classroom to community service projects that are connected to the school curriculum. The service-learning activities that are most effective in achieving the goals of civic education are those that are linked emphatically to civics content and processes. Also, they engage students in briefing and debriefing activities that enable them to place their service-learning projects into a civic/political context and to derive maximum civic learning from them (Billig 2002).

Fourth, offer extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for students to be involved in their schools and communities. There is a strong, positive relationship between democratic participatory experiences in the school and community and student achievement of the skills and dispositions of democratic citizenship (Baldi and Others 2001; Niemi and Junn 1998; Putnam 2000; Torney-Purta and Others 2001).

Fifth, encourage students to participate in school governance. If students have more opportunities to participate democratically in the management of their own classrooms and schools, they are more likely to achieve the civic skills and attitudes of citizenship in a democracy (Baldi and Others 2001; Niemi and Junn 1998; Torney-Purta and Others 2001).

Sixth, encourage student participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures. Involving students in well-designed simulations of elections, courtroom trials, legislative hearings and deliberations, for example, is related to increased student achievement of civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Lutkus and Others 1999; Niemi and Junn 1998).

Recommendations for School Administrators and Policymakers. *The Civic Mission of Schools* concludes with recommendations for the improvement of schools and school systems through improved administration, policymaking, government-funded programs, and research. Following are six main recommendations selected from a longer list in the report.

First, the federal government should substantially increase the amount of its funding available to states for projects and programs to improve civic education in schools.

Second, state governments should implement improved standards for the teaching and learning of democracy and citizenship and standards-based assessment of civic education in schools.

Third, schools and departments of education in colleges and universities should strengthen the civic components of the preservice preparation of teachers and the inservice development of teachers in elementary and secondary schools.

John J. Patrick is Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Director of the Social Studies Development Center, and Professor of Education at Indiana University, Bloomington. He was among the 56 experts invited to participate in the development and endorsement of *The Civic Mission of Schools*, from which the content of this Digest is derived.

Fourth, local level administrators, curriculum specialists, and teachers should work together with state education departments to develop and establish a core curriculum in civics for all students in grades K-12. This core curriculum should incorporate the six promising practices noted above.

Fifth, public and private funders should promote more and better research in school-based civic education. Researchers should be encouraged to develop warranted indicators for the achievement of civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes at each level of K-12 schooling.

Sixth, community leaders and educators should seek support to build and maintain national and state coalitions of groups and individuals to promote better and more civic education in schools.

Internet Resources. The following World Wide Web sites include resources for researchers and teachers on civic education.

Carnegie Corporation of New York. Created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911, this nonprofit corporation promotes "the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding." Among its recent initiatives to promote the common good are activities to advance the civic learning and engagement of young Americans: <www.carnegie.org>.

Center for Civic Education (CCE). The CCE Web site contains papers on theory, research, and practice in civic education. There also are links to other useful sites such as Civnet, which provides information on international civic education projects: <http://www.civiced.org/>.

Center for Information and Research in Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE). The Center promotes research on the civic engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. CIRCLE funds research that has implications for those who work to increase young people's engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a clearinghouse for relevant information and scholarship. The Center's Web site includes reports and papers on research in civic education: <http://www.civicyouth.org/>.

National Alliance for Civic Education (NACE). Launched in 2000, NACE is an alliance of organizations committed to the advancement of civic knowledge and engagement. The NACE Web site includes reports on research and practice in civic education with many links to other sites on civic education: <http://www.puaf.umd.edu/NACE/>.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche, paper, or electronic full text from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; World Wide Web <edrs.com>; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

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This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-99-CO-0016. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated.

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